



1960s postcard from Florida

NEW ERA OF DEVELOPMENT

Retirees from the Northeast and Midwest discover South Florida and leave the snow behind to claim their slice of paradise. Developers begin creating new suburbs in remote locations at a record pace, with plots often selling sight unseen. Travelers pass miles and miles of orange groves along major arteries of Interstates 75 and 95. To make up for the loss of Cuban sugar, under embargo since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, U.S. trade officials offer incentives to produce more sugar in the Everglades. The influx of Cuban refugees includes experienced sugarcane growers and the industry expands rapidly. The Kissimmee River, once meandering through wide marshes to eventually deliver precious water flows into Lake Okeechobee, is channeled into a large and straight canal as part of the immense Flood Control Project.

1962

Construction of the Kissimmee Canal begins.

The federal Flood Control Project begins channelizing the Kissimmee River from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee, resulting in a 56-mile-long, 30-foot-deep drainage canal (known as the C-38) through the river's floodplain. Six water control structures are built along the length of the canal to provide navigation and flood protection for central Florida. In the Upper Chain of Lakes south of Orlando (headwaters of the Kissimmee River), canals are dredged to connect the lakes, and water control structures are built to regulate water levels in the lakes.



Kissimmee River prior to channelization

1963

Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) are completed.

The central and southern sections of the Everglades are divided into three water conservation areas ringed by levees to control water levels. Inland Everglades runoff is now separated from that originating along the coast. WCAs also retain water pumped from the canal system, water that otherwise would be discharged to the sea. Additionally, the WCAs recharge underlying aquifers — underground rock layers that retain rainfall and supply most of the fresh water for the coastal population.



Dedication of Water Conservation Area 3 at one of the S-12 spillways

1965

Lack of water becomes critical in Everglades National Park.

Due to severe drought, alligator holes dry up, and saltwater intrusion along coastal areas shrinks fish and wildlife habitats. Park officials dynamite holes out of the limestone bedrock to provide adequate habitat for the animals. To provide relief, the Flood Control District implements an emergency water release schedule from Conservation Area 3. Only 5 percent of the alligator population survives the drought. In September, Hurricane Betsy floods the Everglades with 6 to 10 inches of rain.

1966

Deer populations suffer in too much water.

After heavy rains in the spring and summer, high water levels cause deer in the water conservation areas to drown or die from starvation. Hurricane Alma dumps another 6 inches of rain onto the area.



Deer in flooded water conservation area



20th anniversary of Everglades Wilderness Area, 1969

1968

Flood Control Act modifies the Central and Southern Florida Project.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers makes recommendations to increase storage, distribution and conservation of water throughout the project area. This includes increased water delivery to Everglades National Park (315,000 acre-feet). Shortcomings and unintended negative impacts of the Flood Control Project are documented and publicly acknowledged for the first time.